

## IRAQI ELECTIONS A PHENOMENAL EVENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, when I am at home and speaking to groups, I oftentimes ask them, the constituents that I am talking to, have you heard any good news lately on the radio or heard any good news on television or have you read any good news in the newspaper? Most often the silence is deafening.

But we do not have to look far for good news, either here at home or around the world. Much of that good news is directly related to the actions of Americans. That certainly has been true with the outpouring of support and relief for our fellow citizens who have been victims of recent hurricanes and other natural disasters, and this past Saturday the world witnessed not just good news but great news. The election in Iraq this past weekend was a phenomenal event, a remarkable step toward an independent, sovereign, democratic nation. What good news this is.

This is a momentous event, a huge step forward, and toward the approaching day when we will be able to bring home our service men and women.

Did you hear the good news, Mr. Speaker? Listen to some of the voices.

Lieutenant Colonel Steve Boylan in Baghdad said: "Nationwide security was a resounding success, with all of the 13 recorded attacks aimed at election targets failing."

Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, talking about TV coverage, said: "I have seen pictures of citizens who are proud to be shown on camera having voted. There were no such pictures from these places in the last election. The victory for Iraq is that they are voting."

Listen to the voices, Mr. Speaker. Abdul Hussein Ahmed emerged from a polling station in the southern city of Najaf with his purple ink-stained finger raised aloft and he said: "Five members of my family were killed by Saddam and his people but now with this constitution everyone is equal under the law."

Listen to the voices, Mr. Speaker. Razifa Hussein Abdullah arrived at the polling station with tears in her eyes. Her husband, Hussein Salim, leaned on her for balance as they walked. They had returned several months ago from exile in Iran where they had fled during the Iran-Iraq war of the eighties. "We suffered a lot," she said, "and today I came to get revenge for all of these years I stayed away from my country to feel that I am an Iraqi again. It was a dream to get rid of Saddam and today is another dream come true," she said.

There is the quote from this poster, Mr. Speaker. Listen to the voices. "I voted then for Saddam, of course, be-

cause I was afraid, but this time I came here by my own choice. I am not afraid anymore. I am a free man."

Some editorials have finally recognized the importance of this occurrence. The New York Post said, "The referendum results vindicate U.S. policy and are a giant step toward regional peace." The New York Times, yes, the New York Times, said, "What we know already and can't fail to be impressed by is that large numbers of Iraqis of all persuasions turned out in defiance of terrorist threats to decide their constitutional future. They have exercised a basic democratic right that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago." Even the New York Times.

Mr. Speaker, oftentimes we are too close to the happenings of the day to appreciate their gravity and I think we are just a little too close now. This past Saturday was a red letter date in the history of the world, and the naysayers notwithstanding, this is a day and a time to celebrate and congratulate. I am proud to be an American. I am proud of and humbled by the selfless acts by so many of our fellow citizens in Iraq. In the 1800s, de Tocqueville said that America is not good because it is great, it is great because it is good. It is that goodness that continues to strive for liberty for all. What a momentous time we are in as we celebrate and witness that march of liberty around the world.

Mr. Speaker, it is good news. Let's spread that good news.

## REPORT OF CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I came today to talk about the great privilege I had just 2 weeks ago to lead a congressional delegation to Iraq. It was my very first trip. I did not know what to expect. But as we approached the airport and you could look down, all you saw was very brown, very barren, very flat land. I realized as we were coming into Kuwait City that we had done a very, very poor job as elected leaders to tell the American people what our military men and women are doing in Iraq, why they are doing it, the incredible progress that they are making and the consequences not only to Iraq and to the Middle East, to the U.S. but to the entire world if they were to fail.

Since this was an armed services trip, our mission was to meet with the troops, to meet with their commanders, to learn more about their mission, to see some of the technology that they are able to use to help them, to hear of their successes and to hear of the problems or things that we as Members of Congress could help them with.

The very first person that I met was a young man on that airstrip in Kuwait City as we were waiting to board a C-130. As I was talking to him, he looked up to me and he said, "Ma'am, don't worry about me. I know what I'm doing and I know why I'm doing it, and I can tell you that there will never be another attack on our nation if I have anything to do with it. So don't worry. Just pray for me." And he walked away. What an overwhelming feeling that that was from somebody probably in their very, very early twenties.

That same evening as we had dinner with troops from Virginia, and I would like to take a moment and thank the Peterson Foundation and AT&T who provided us with telephone cards to give to our very brave men and women so that they could call home, but there was a young woman from Virginia who looked me straight in the eye and I already knew this, I had already sensed it and felt it, but she looked at me and said, "Why aren't our elected leaders telling America what we're doing?" I had no answer for her, except to make the commitment to her that we would do that.

Please understand that there are very huge successes that have been made in Iraq. We hear the stories, and any story is one too many, about our men and women who are injured or killed by the IEDs. The stories that we do not hear are about how successful our military men and women have been at finding these devices, at exploding them or disarming them before someone is hurt.

We watched the Predator land on film as it has been patrolling around Iraq and certainly been a great asset to the military. We talked about civil things, such as the need for electricity, the talk about blackouts, and what we learned is that, yes, there are blackouts in Iraq but the biggest reason is because of increased demand for electricity. I did not know that Iraqis were out buying TV sets and refrigerators and other appliances and have greatly increased it. I was not aware of the condition that Saddam Hussein put his own country in and that for 6 years prior to this conflict that he was allowing raw sewage from Baghdad to flow into the Tigris River.

During Saddam Hussein's reign, there were no independent TV stations. Today, there are 44. No independent commercial radio stations. Today, there are 72. No independent newspapers and magazines. Today, there are 100. We also do not talk about the huge successes of the Iraqi security force and the fact that we as Americans have turned over 24 fully operational bases to the Iraqi government.

We flew from Baghdad to Balad air base by helicopter. We flew very low and very fast. I was surprised, first of all, to see how green the nation was in that area, and more surprised to see the people who were working those agricultural fields who waved to that helicopter as it went by. When we landed